

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 24, 2004

CONTACT: Israel Klein

**or Michal Freedhoff
(202) 225-2836**

Statement of Congressman Edward J. Markey (D-MA)

Preventing Nuclear Hazards in America

A Congressional Briefing on the 25th Anniversary of the Three Mile Island nuclear meltdown

Thank you very much for inviting me to speak to you today.

Back in the 1950's, when I was a boy, Americans were told that "Our Friend the Atom" was going to produce nuclear energy that was too cheap to meter. The wave of nuclear boosterism that followed, however, led to complacency about safety, and safety nearly led us to disaster. Twenty-five years ago, the Three Mile Island accident represented a wake-up call to the nuclear industry and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and to most Americans. You will be hearing later this morning from representatives of the Three Mile Island community who continue to be victimized by the health and environmental impacts of the radiation they were exposed to.

In the accident's immediate aftermath, the Kearney Commission made a number of reform proposals, and Congress held investigative hearings. In response, the NRC implemented some long-needed safety reforms. Unfortunately, over the years they have weakened some of those reforms at the behest of the nuclear industry. Today of course, we have more than accidental meltdowns to worry about. We now have the threat of nuclear terrorism.

September 11, 2001 should also have been a wake up call to the nuclear industry and the NRC about the need to take this threat seriously. Unfortunately, the inadequate steps the NRC has taken to improve security since 9/11 were developed behind closed doors with the nuclear industry, without an opportunity for state and local officials, emergency responders, or the affected public to submit comments or participate. Twenty-five years since Three Mile Island and two and a half years since the worst terrorist attack in the U.S., the NRC and the industry continue to shortchange safety and security at nuclear reactors. Consider the following facts:

- The NRC still has not conducted a permanent rulemaking to upgrade security at nuclear reactors to address the terrorist threat we now know we face, even though Al Qaeda has made it clear that it views nuclear reactors as attractive terrorist targets.
- The NRC has been barring or impeding stakeholders, outside interest groups and independent experts from providing input in its safety and security proceedings, while allowing the nuclear industry and its lobbyists unfettered access.
- In the public relations materials the NRC developed for the 25th Anniversary of the TMI accident, the Commission actually cites improved fire safety regulations at the top of its list of post-Three Mile Island reforms. What is remarkable about this claim is that it appears that after discovering that many nuclear reactor operators were out of compliance with the fire regulations, the Commission has decided to gut these regulations rather than insist that industry actually comply with them. Instead of requiring non-combustible materials or physical separation of the electrical systems that would be used to shut down a

reactor in the event of a fire, the NRC is proposing to allow the industry to assign reactor personnel the duty of rushing directly to the shut-down equipment located throughout the reactor complex to shut down the reactors manually. This could potentially take place in areas impacted by smoke, fire and radiation and possibly under attack by terrorists. If these personnel fail to reach the shut-down equipment, the result could be catastrophic – a melt-down like TMI, or even worse.

- On January 25, 2003 the Davis-Besse plant in Ohio – which was already shut down because boric acid had eaten through the containment vessel - was infected with the Slammer worm virus, which shut down two of its computer systems for over four hours. The NRC only sent notices of this cyber-vulnerability a few days after I sent a letter requesting information about the problem. The Commission needs to get serious about the threat of hacking and cyber-terrorism at nuclear plants, so that keystrokes can't lead to meltdowns.

It should not take another catastrophic accident to get the NRC to stop being an industry lapdog and start being the public safety watchdog it is supposed to be. I applaud all of you for your efforts in ensuring that the public remains aware and the NRC remains accountable for the safety and security of the nuclear power industry. I look forward to continuing to work with you on these issues in the months and years ahead.

#